

cinefex

number 17
\$4.75
Canada — \$5.95



cinefex

...the journal of cinematic illusions

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CINEFEX 17 — June 1984. Published quarterly at P.O. Box 20027, Riverside, California 92516. Subscriptions (U.S.): four issues — \$15; eight issues — \$25. Return postage must accompany all unsolicited manuscripts, photos or other materials. Printed by Valley Printers, Sunnymead, California; typesetting by The Set-Up, Riverside, California; color separations by VividColour, City of Industry, California. Contents copyright © 1984 by Don Shay. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

Ghostbusters 4

After a stellar seven-year association with the Lucasfilm family, four-time Oscar winner Richard Edlund departed Industrial Light and Magic to establish his own effects organization at Entertainment Effects Group. *Ghostbusters* — his first independent assignment — presented him with the challenge of producing nearly two hundred varied and complex effects shots in considerably less than a year. Before he could even begin, however, the facility — formerly operated by Douglas Trumbull and Richard Yuricich — had to be restructured, additional equipment had to be designed and built, and a top-notch crew had to be assembled from the ground up. Edlund details the problems involved and — together with key members of his production unit — discusses the magic that went into Ivan Reitman's supernatural comedy. *Article by Adam Eisenberg.*

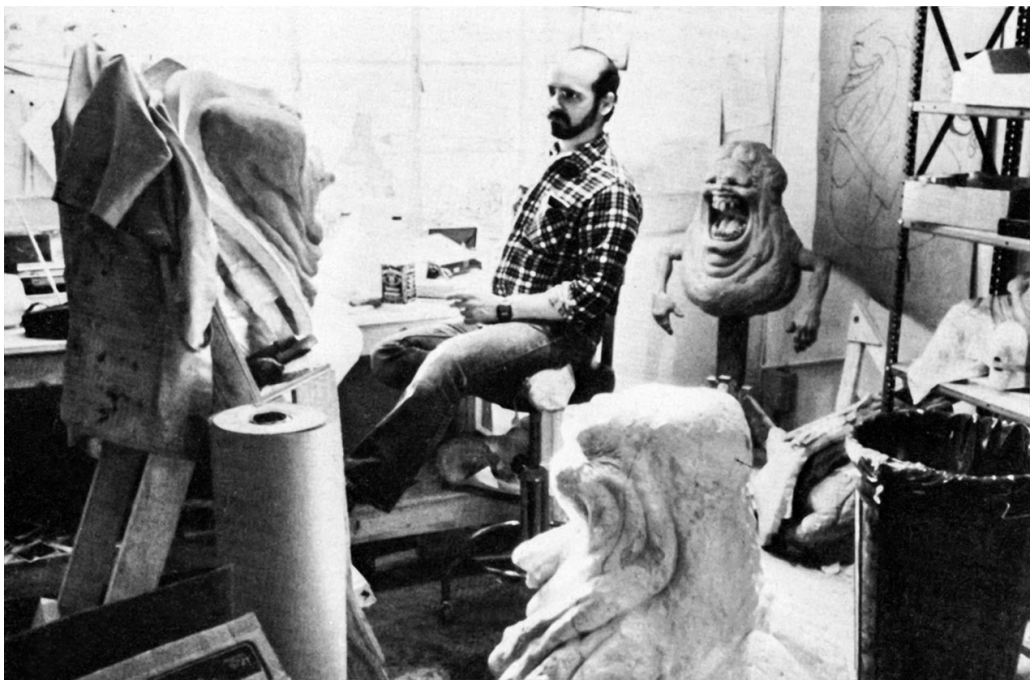
The Last Starfighter — Imagery Wrought in the Total Forge 54

When John Whitney Jr. and Gary Demos established Digital Productions in 1981, they did so with an eye towards building a facility that would revolutionize the field of computer generated imagery and at the same time introduce to the film industry a viable alternative to optical effects and motion control photography. Armed with the Cray X-MP — the world's most powerful computer — they turned their high tech talents loose on *The Last Starfighter*, generating an unprecedented twenty-five minutes of digital scene simulation. Whitney and Demos discuss the unique nature and capabilities of Digital Productions, while individual members of the simulation team delve into the specifics of their premiere film — featuring, among other things, some of the most complex computer imagery ever produced. *Article by Peter Sorensen.*

FRONT COVER — The Stay-Puft marshmallow invades New York in *Ghostbusters*.
The Gun Star passes through Rylosian clouds in *The Last Starfighter* — BACK COVER.











"In order to make visual effects work," Bruno explained, "you have to work the camera into position during the live-action so that when the special effects come, the audience is not expecting them and the effects don't stand out. You can't just go from the camera being in one spot for the live-action and then move it abruptly for the effect. You have to try to make a smooth transition between shots so that people won't know the effects are coming unless you want them to. I tried to design the boards to take this into account — I tried to stage the shots for effect.

"After the boards were completed and received Ivan's approval, we had meetings at EEG to determine how the scenes would be achieved. For instance, how would we get the guys looking over the ledge of the building with their weapons pointing down at the marshmallow man as he walked up the street towards them? We had to decide that the shot would involve a matte painting of the building, a bluescreen of the guys, a miniature of the street and a man in a suit; and we also had to decide where the camera should be positioned for the plate. We had a number of meetings on that and then numbered the shots to see how many we had. Then we took all of the boards to Ivan and negotiated how many scenes we thought we could really do, given our deadline, and then pared out the individual shots we didn't think we needed. A lot of those kinds of changes occurred until we actually started shooting."

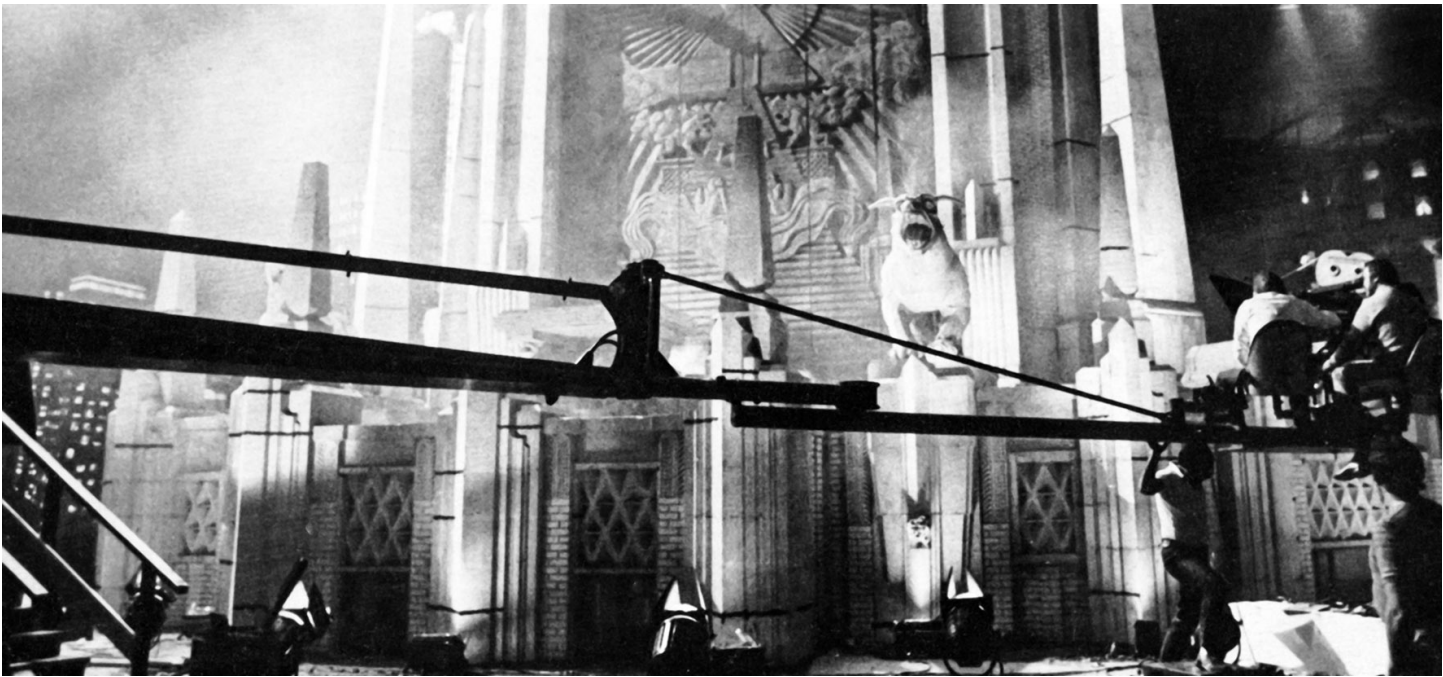
Though EEG was still in a transitional state when principal photography began in October, Richard Edlund — along with Neil Krepela and Alan Harding — went off to New York to film background plates with the first unit. Filming on location in the Big Apple proved to be a difficult, though ultimately successful venture. The production company shot in and around Manhattan, often blocking traffic and incurring the wrath of frustrated New Yorkers who didn't like having their lives disrupted. Perhaps the most difficult location was Spook Central, the building on which the Gozer temple would be placed and the center for much of *Ghostbusters*' second half. Located at 55 Central Park West, the building was a perfect site for the story, but not the most convenient site to film.

Since it was directly across from Central Park, there were no tall buildings nearby to afford an elevated view. As a result, Edlund had to go up in a helicopter and circle the building in order to get a clear view of Spook Central from a position above street level. Under those conditions, the best he could do was take Hasselblad snapshots of the building, which would later serve as reference for matte painter Matthew Yuricich and the model shop crew. Edlund had considerably more success capturing the classic Manhattan skyline, but not until the production unit struck a rather strange deal. "We wanted to go to the top of the RCA Building in order to get the shot of New York. The view from up there is really fabulous, and it looks downtown

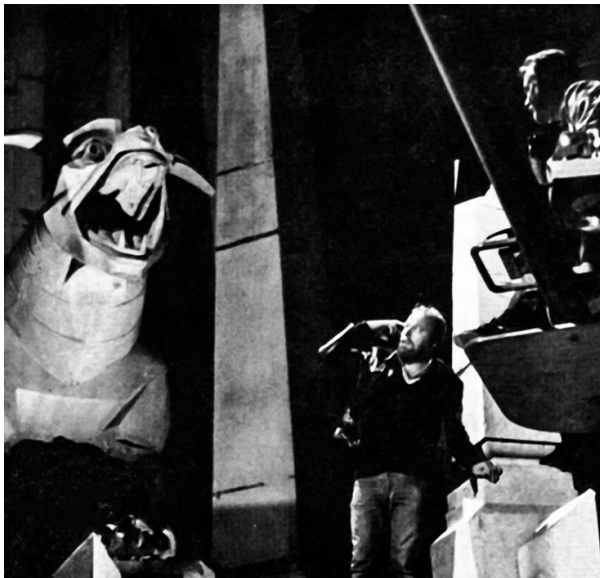
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— was also in the hole so that he could watch and make certain that no one got caught up by accident.

During the battle that follows between the Ghostbusters and the Stay-Puft man, giant masses of molten marshmallow drop to the streets below. To help dress the set appropriately, Gaspar and his crew had to develop a marshmallow-like substance that could be sprayed on the New York location to match the large, marshmallowy set pieces that they had constructed. "We knew that snow would not have hung in thick enough on the street," Gaspar recalled, "and the next thing that came to mind was using shaving cream or whipped cream. We started contacting different companies and found a place called Puritan Products that could provide us with the foam itself. Shaving cream in cans is propelled by propane; but that didn't really agree with us, because we had to use such large quantities. So we mixed freon for the propellant, and premixed and shook them together in big tanks before spraying out the foam. It really did look like huge blobs of marshmallow."

When the Stay-Puft man gets blasted by the Ghostbusters and starts to burn away, a large glob of marshmallow falls on top of EPA administrator Walter Peck. For that effect, Gaspar once again used his special foam formula; only this time, it could not be sprayed from the tanks. Instead, he had to take a slightly different approach. "We used a huge plastic bag that was six feet in diameter and eighteen feet long, and attached it to a crane. The bottom center of the bag was cut open, and then pulled up to the top of the crane to create a cavity inside the bag, like an upside-down cake. We filled the cavity with foam and then, when we released the bottom, it fell down and allowed the foam to dump out all at one time. One test proved the system would work, but we also did it with a stuntman to show William Atherton — the actor playing Peck — that he wouldn't be hurt. Someone had mentioned that the stunt involved two hundred pounds of foam, and while it wasn't like two hundred pounds of lead, it was enough to throw the actor off. So we did one test with a stunt double, and it was very safe — but boy, did that foam go all over the place."

Despite the problems of traffic control, not to mention the dropping of marshmallow blobs, Joe Medjuck felt the New York shoot went amazingly well. "Joe Day and Chuck Gaspar did an extraordinary job, especially considering the number of effects they had to do — from small things like constructing the Ghostbusters' proton packs and Nutrona wands, to building the Ectomobile, to making it look as if there had been an earthquake on Central Park West. They were always very calm, too. I was most worried when we dropped the Stay-Puft man's giant hat in the midst of three hundred extras. It wasn't exactly a light hat, since in order to make it fall properly, it had to be aluminum-reinforced to keep its shape — and it was eighteen feet across. I kept asking Joe Day 'Where is it going to land?'

Filming on set — a t represent uppermo: York sky: on stage Studios b designer Reitman as the ca in on the As the sp Gozer pre themselv imposing crumbles living cla Stagehan adjustme mechanic by rods a down thr set. / As Michael G Reitman

built simultaneously to be a perfect match so they could be intercut. As a result, Randy would sculpt the small one in absolute detail, down to every bump, notch and wrinkle, while in the next room, Mike and the others were sculpting the full-size one. They would come into Randy's room, measure a detail on anything from the leg to the eye to the bone structure, scale it up and then do it on the big one. What was remarkable about it was that when they were finished, both sizes worked for their individual purposes. The big one worked in terms of being believable on the set, and the little one worked as a stop-motion puppet. Both could be intercut and we couldn't tell them apart. There was virtually no difference between the two. I was really impressed."

The small dogs were designed to animate some of the broader activities of the dogs, from running up the stairs of the Gozer temple to rushing out into the street, narrowly avoiding being hit by a car, and then diving over a wall into Central Park. While the stop-motion sequences occur on screen for only a matter of seconds, animating them was a slow, painful process during which Cook and his crew — cameraman James Aupperle and assistant Michael Hoover — would put in many a sixteen-hour day. Even so, the stop-motion animation corner at EEG was invariably one of the most lively, if not inspirational, since Cook loves to listen to everything from Gilbert and Sullivan to the Jim Kweskin Jug Band as he carefully adjusts the puppets for each frame of each shot.

"Randy is incredible at stop-motion," Stuart Ziff commented. "One day, he and his crew were doing a very difficult scene. They did like four takes on it. Three of the takes didn't work for different reasons, and for the fourth, they stayed up until three in the morning working on it. When they came in the next morning and started to break down the setup, the cameraman unloaded the film from the previous night's shoot only to discover that someone had forgotten to turn on the torque motor and the result was spaghetti inside the camera box. Randy was very upset, and he told me he didn't want to do the shot again. I suggested he do another shot and return to that one in a couple of weeks, but he said he had to finish it now.

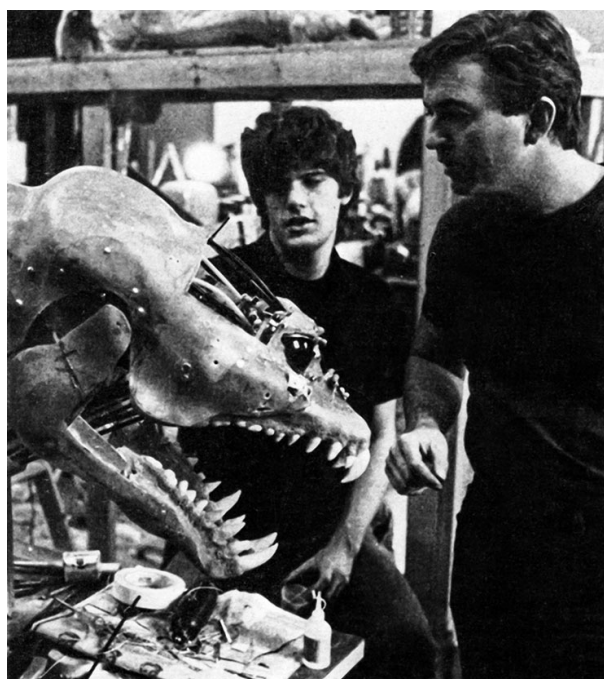
"The next night, they tried the shot again. It was something like a five-second shot — which would take *hours* to animate — and they were literally four-and-one-half seconds into it, with eighteen frames to go, when a stepper motor burned out and fell, causing the puppet to knock over the animation gauges. Randy put the puppet back where he thought it had been, and the next morning came in after the motor had been replaced and continued the shot. He finished the take and it worked. A lot of people doing stop-motion might have gotten flustered and had to start over — some get flustered by *any* interruption. But with Randy, you can go over and talk with him, the stepper motor can blow out, the film can not feed, and the next











it look real."

Once the hands have grabbed Dana, the chair swivels abruptly and then slides quickly into the kitchen where the forces of Gozer await her. For this shot, the arms were stuffed rubber shells which were either wired in place or held in position by Weaver herself. The chair — hooked to a cable drum — traveled along a track which was easily concealed between tiles in the set's parquet floor.

Chuck Gaspar supervised the traveling chair, and worked with Weaver on a number of other stunts. Perhaps the most unusual was rigging the scene in which Dana first welcomes the Gozer's spiritual forces. Their entrance is, to say the least, a big one when they blow out one entire wall of her apartment. "The wall explosion was an effect that was not originally in the script," Gaspar explained. "Ivan came over to me one day during production and said: 'A couple of weeks from now, I want you to blow this wall out and have Dana standing right in front of the window.' When we did the shot, I actually had her back off about seven feet so she wouldn't feel a thing. Everything was away from her anyway. John DeCuir built the hole he wanted to see after the wall was blown out, and then we filled it in with balsawood bricks and breakaway glass and frames — so it was really just hanging in space. We had fans behind Sigourney, just to create that little bit of an eerie effect, and then when the wall blew out, we had more fans to blow her dress and hair around.

"To blow out the wall itself, we used fifteen air mortars, each holding 150 psi of air and about two quarts of wet sand. The mortars acted like shotguns. The sand was in the tubes, and once it left the mortar it spread out. There was enough of an impact with that fine sand to take everything out, although you never see the sand itself. Sand is ideal because it breaks up when it hits glass or whatever, and you can't see it. The mortars were placed on either side of Sigourney and above her, all pointed towards the wall. We also used a few cables out in front to pull down the ironwork handrail on her balcony — which was actually made out of rubber — and to move plants that were also on the balcony. The camera was protected by a thick piece of plexiglass and, while it wasn't going to be too noisy, I gave Sigourney earplugs so the sudden noise wouldn't startle her."

"It was great," Weaver exclaimed. "I'd love to do it again. It was just like being behind a tidal wave, or being the only person in the world inside an explosion. I was a little afraid because they told me not to move a muscle or even blink an

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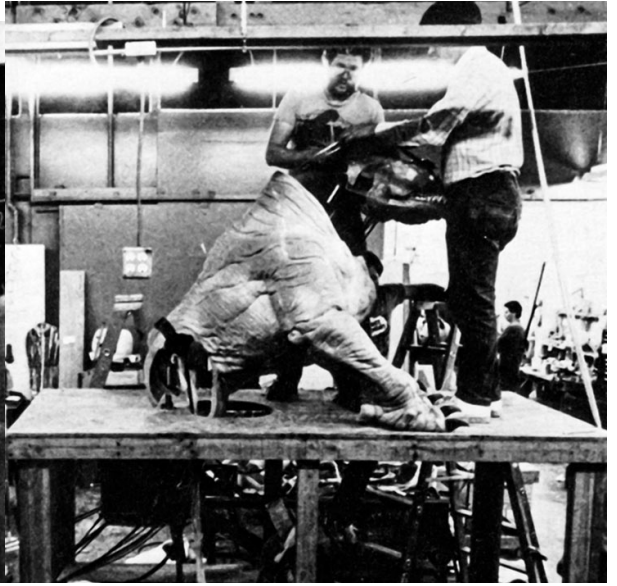
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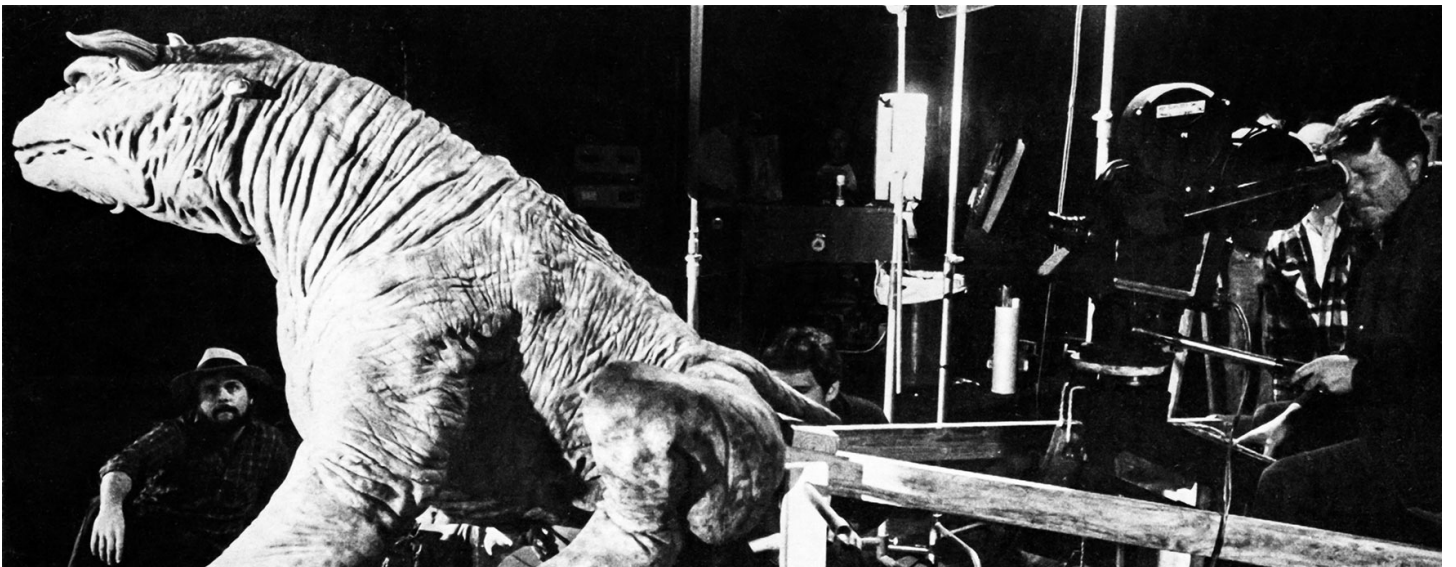
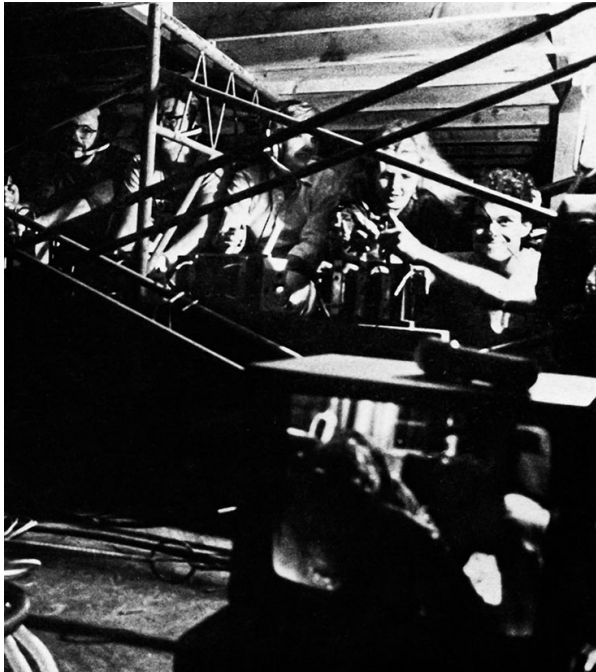
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stacks at the Los Angeles Public Library for the Ghostbusters' encounter with a phantom librarian. And they also developed the mixture that would serve as ectoplasmic goop throughout the production. In reality, the sticky, slimy substance was made out of methylcellulose ether — or Methycel, for short. Generally used in pharmaceuticals and food thickeners, the Methycel powder was mixed with water and food coloring to the gooey consistency desired for the film.

Meanwhile, back in Marina del Rey, the ghost shop was busy preparing the different manifestations that would soon have to be filmed on the EEG stages. Steve Johnson, for instance, was finishing up work on the librarian ghost. In their first real brush with the spiritual realm, the Ghostbusters stalk their quarry through the stacks of the New York Public Library, ultimately coming upon an elderly, semi-transparent woman floating a foot above the floor and reading a book. When they try to grab her, however, the old woman quickly turns on them, transforming into a particularly horrific demon. The startling effect involved two stages — the first with an actress portraying the librarian, and the second with a mechanical figure that featured an understructure that could initiate a series of cable-operated moves and body contortions.

"When the shot begins," Johnson explained, "Dan Aykroyd and Bill Murray have just jumped away from the image of the actress in makeup and she turns towards the camera and starts going through a move. As her hands get to a certain point, we lap-dissolve to our figure, which sculpturally looked exactly like her except that we'd already had a changing mechanism under it and her eyes looked different. During the dissolve, we had the mechanism start changing just slightly so that at first, there was no dramatic change. The mechanical figure was completely locked off and machined to do one set of moves. The head lowered on the body, the rib cage burst out, the body grew seven inches, the waist thinned, the arms lengthened eight inches, the eyes sank in and the teeth came out so that the face started to get an alligator look to it. All of this was tied to just two handles. John and Nicholas Alberti, who designed the articulating mechanisms, are just amazing. They created a structure that practically allowed you to just sit back and smoke a cigarette while you pulled two levers and watched an old lady turn into a demon." An additional stage of the transformation was initially planned in which the ghost would become even more monstrous; but with the footage they already had, both Edlund and Reitman concurred that further elaboration was unnecessary.

Perhaps the most outlandish spirit to haunt the Ghostbusters is the Onionhead ghost — a greenish, foul-smelling lump of transparent ectoplasm that terrorizes the unsuspecting patrons of a posh New York hotel. Unlike many of the other creatures in the film, Onionhead's design did not change drastically from

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We thought that would be the easiest way to do him, with completely puppeted arms and everything. But then we got into a deadline crunch, and Richard thought it would save a lot of time if we could do him as a suit worn by a puppeteer. We made the suit out of foam rubber, reinforced with spandex, and originally we thought we were going to have to support the suit from above with cables to help the puppeteer hold the weight of the suit. But once we put Mark Wilson in the suit, we realized that wasn't a problem because the suit wasn't that heavy. Another reason we were going to put him on cables was so we could have him swing around really unbelievably for shots of Onionhead skating around corners. But if we'd put him on wires, there would have been difficult lighting problems to deal with because they would have had to light an enormous area." Ultimately, it was decided that the more eccentric moves could be effected by having Neil Krepela project and rephotograph the Onionhead imagery on Compsy. Mark Wilson — in the Onionhead suit — could be lit properly in a stationary position and then during photography tilt and undulate his body so that desired size and positioning aspects could be created later.

On stage, Onionhead was filmed almost totally against black, with a team of puppeteers operating the various cables off to the side and out of camera range. Sometimes, puppeteers were also needed to help move parts of the suit — the bottom of the mouth, for example, was controlled by a bar that came out from the underside of the suit — and they were cloaked in black to blend into the background. For one particular shot where Onionhead twirls around in place, John Bruno had a spinner rig built to allow the cable operators to ride below while Wilson was standing on top. Another puppeteer, also dressed in black, turned the rig around. Wilson, who was essentially covered in the suit from the waist up, wore latex rubber Onionhead arms over his own, and his legs were cloaked in black. Occasionally, cameraman John Lambert would pan or tilt slightly while he was recording the action, but more complicated movements were added later on Compsy.

"With the Compsy system," explained Neil Krepela, "we could add many different types of moves to the Onionhead shots that couldn't be done easily on the stage. For instance, since the suit was worn by a human and tended to be large and therefore not easily rotated upside down or turned in other unusual ways, we could rephotograph static shots of him taken on the stage and flip him over, make him dart across frame or appear to be streaking away very fast. By doing these moves with the Compsy, it helped add some ease to shooting Onionhead on the stage, because it allowed Mark inside the suit to concentrate more on his performance."

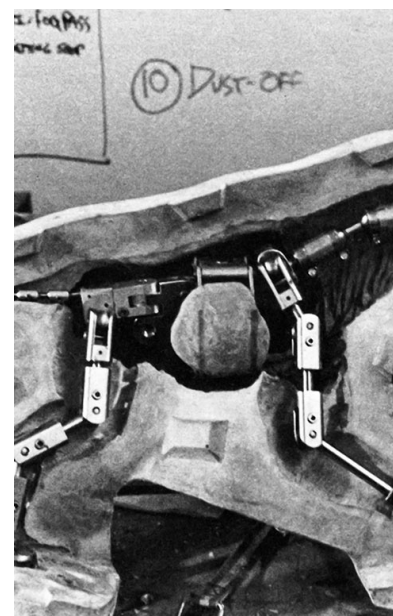
Wilson was not completely locked into position during his scenes. To bring Onionhead to life, he had to move around and gesticulate broadly with his arms and body. He also did moves that showed changes in perspective and angle on the creature

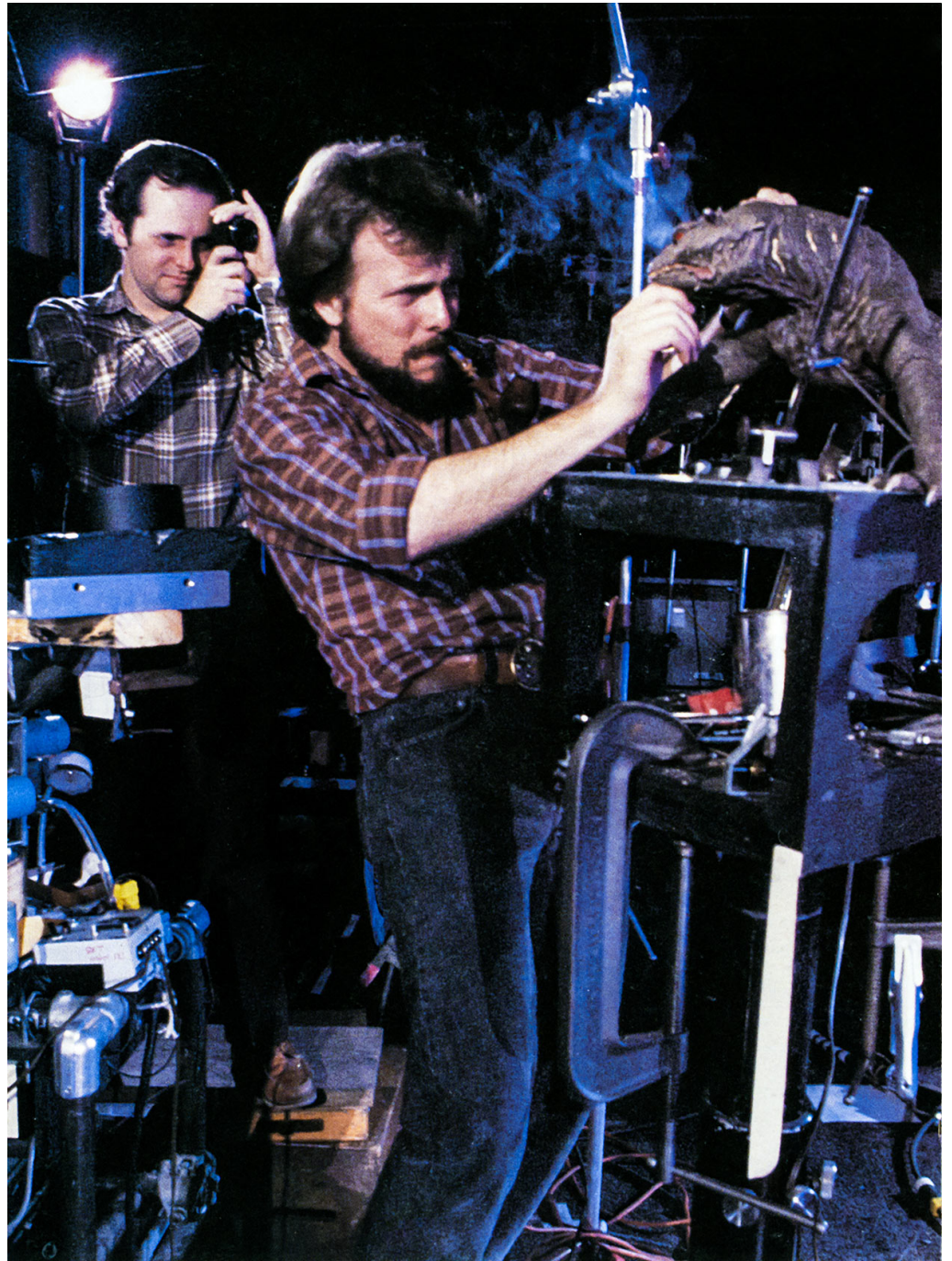
Actress Sigourney Weaver meets her cinematic alter ego during a visit to EEG. / A Terror Dog armature positioned inside its plaster mold prior to injection of the foam latex used to produce the final stop-motion puppet.

In contrast to his prior stop-motion experience — which involved split-screen rear process compositing —

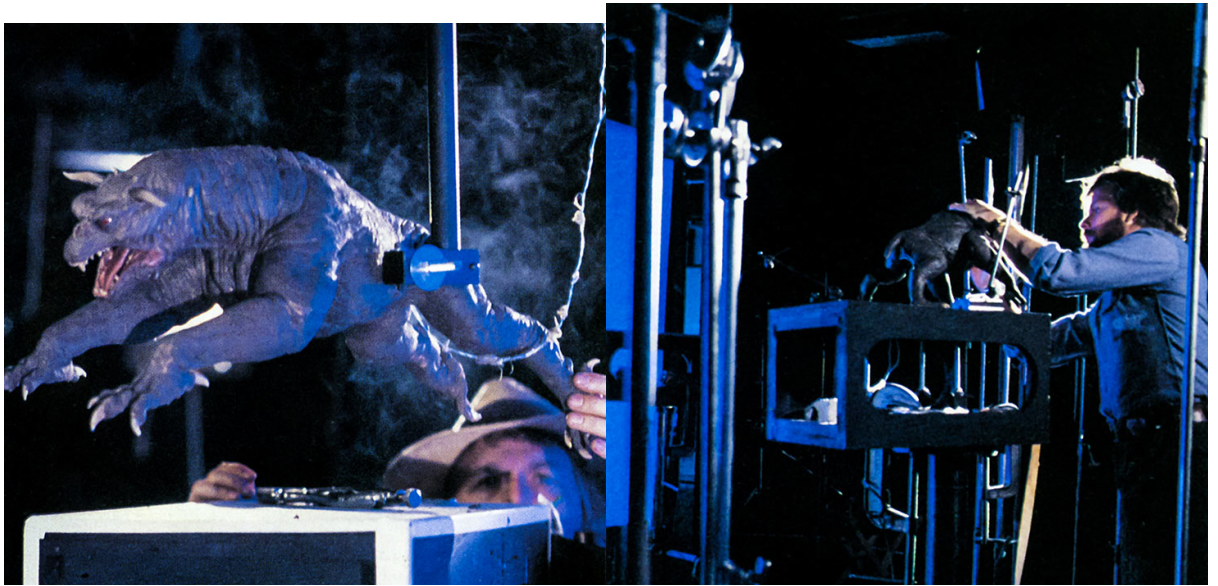
Cook animated his Ghostbusters characters against a blue screen for later optical compositing with the live-action plates. /

Cook adjusts the Terror Dog puppet for its initial leap into Louis Tully's apartment. / While Cook works





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While Dana stands transfixed, the forces of Gozer blast out an entire wall in her penthouse apartment. To achieve the shot, John DeCuir designed and constructed the set as it was to appear after the explosion. Then Chuck Gaspar and his crew filled it in with balsawood bricks and breakaway glass. Inside, fifteen air mortars were mounted and filled with wet sand — which when fired under pressure acted like invisible shotgun pellets to blow out the wall and windows. At the same time, concealed wires collapsed the flexible rubber handrails on the balcony. / Inside the room, Sigourney Weaver's stand-in takes her place during the prolonged setup. The interior of the breakaway wall and two of the air mortars can be seen. / Matte artist Matthew Yuricich at work on a painting of Spook Central. When completed, the small dark area in the upper front corner of the building will contain a rear-projected live-action plate of the Ghostbusters peering out the blown-away wall of Dana's

very grueling shot. Also, while I could look out the back of the mouth when we used the smiling face, I needed a Watchman monitor for this shot, because we were using the drinking face which had the lips puckered up very tightly. On the last couple of takes, we decided to just have me pour the water right into the mouth, which caused it to come cascading down all over me and short out the monitor. Unfortunately, when we got the takes back, the bottle didn't show up well against the black backdrop because it was so dark, and we had to repeat the shot all over again using a lighter-colored bottle." In addition, the drinking face was deemed out of character with the smiling face that had been used for most of the other scenes, so the shot was redone using the smiling face, which could be made to contort into the drinking expression. Besides Wilson in the suit, Onionhead was also portrayed by a puppet for one shot in which he flips over and pushes a room service cart away, and a small mockup was used by the animation department for several long shots of the ghost streaking as he traveled quickly through the hotel corridors.

"Shooting the Onionhead scenes often seemed to take forever," Bruno added. "Since they weren't completely boarded — because no one ever knew exactly what the ghost was supposed to be doing in every shot — I talked with Ivan a lot about how he wanted Onionhead to act. Sometimes we would shoot twenty-five takes of one scene, and then discover in dailies the next day that the first take was the best. The problem was, we couldn't tell how it looked until we saw it on film because the shots were all somewhat experimental. We were filming the scenes using a 65mm Panavision camera that could go as fast as 60 frames per second, but we actually found that slowing the rate down created the funniest action. We first tried filming at 24 frames per second, then dropped down to twenty. Then one day I suggested we just see what it would look like if we really went slow — like 8 frames per second. We did it for the shot where the Onionhead pounds on his chest and charges towards a frightened Bill Murray, and it really looked funny.

"During the shots, I would hold a stopwatch and call out the time so everyone would know how much was left in the shot. Since we were filming at such a slow rate of speed, everything had to be acted out twice as long. Overall, we tried to do some funny cartoon takes — and certainly, with eight people operating Onionhead, he did take on a total personality. I didn't realize how much Mark as the actor added, for instance, until he was sick one day and Stuart stood in for him. Not that Stuart is not a good actor, but because of his stance and the way he held his arms, the creature took on a completely different personality."

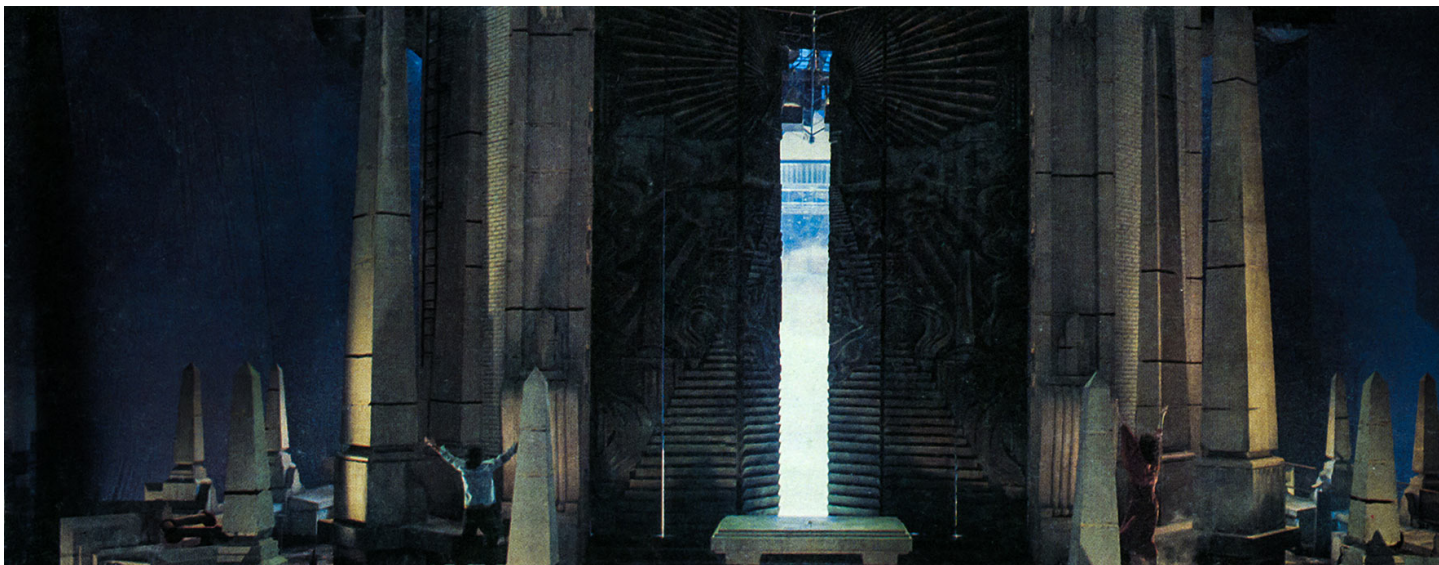
Ghostbusters reaches its climax when the three scientists face their ultimate challenge — battling the ancient Gozer. Proving himself a force to be reckoned with, Gozer assumes one final form to destroy the Ghostbusters and New York City when he





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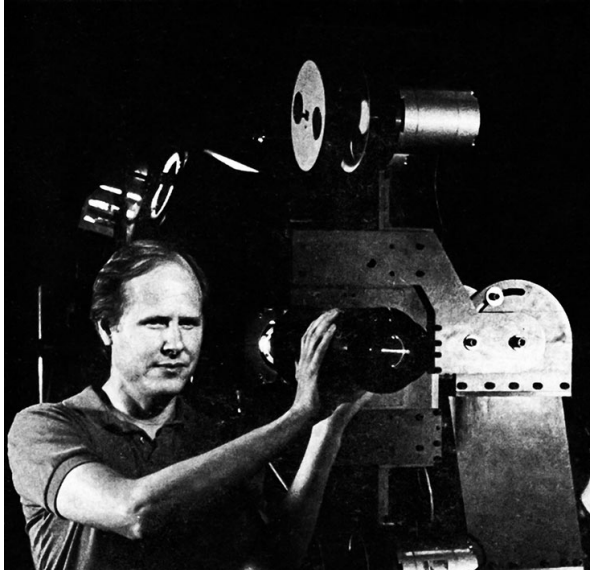
England," Dan Aykroyd explained, "the one *Poltergeist* was based on. The name mysteriously appeared written on the walls throughout the house. For our film, we figured we might as well take something that had been reported as a real occurrence and use it for our main demon and supernatural force. Mr. Stay-Puft, on the other hand, was really just a brand symbol like the Michelin Tire Man or the Pillsbury Dough Boy that has come out of the American consciousness and is then thrown back in our faces by the Gozer. I think of him as being this nice, cute little guy walking down Broadway, hurling sucrose blobs at everybody."

"I think the concept of the Stay-Puft man made everybody a little nervous going in," Michael Gross commented. "Early on, whenever someone read the script, we'd ask them what they thought of the idea, because we were real worried it would take the movie over the top. Harold really struggled to keep the whole film within some kind of reality and believability, but then when it gets to the end and suddenly a 150-foot marshmallow man starts walking through Manhattan, we were all thinking: 'Oh, no! Godzilla time!' Then, when we thought about the problems of doing it realistically, we knew that was impossible — I mean, you put a guy in a rubber suit and you know the audience knows it's a guy in a rubber suit. But when we saw the early tests and rough composites, we knew it would work. What I think really convinced me was even before that, when the guys were on the set reading their lines and doing takes of their expressions when they see him coming. They really set him up, and I thought the audience would love it."

Bringing that marshmallow man to life, however, was not that easy to arrange. At first, not even the size could be determined. "We knew he had to be big, but we didn't know how big," Gross added. "That's because when Ivan was shown little models of the design, there was one representing the Stay-Puft man at 100 feet and one representing him at 125 feet, and there were arguments going back and forth over which one would work better. Ivan finally said: 'Forget it. Put it in the middle.' So we said, 'Okay, he's 112.6 feet tall.'"

Once the full-scale dimensions and designs for the monster had been determined, the next step was to create the human-scale suit to be filmed at EEG. "We had to do a lot of experimentation before we could develop the right suit," said Bill Bryan, a sculptor and designer who had previously worked at Krofft Entertainment and had built suits for the upcoming *Dune*. "On the first one, we just laminated two layers of Scott industrial foam together. The inside layer was made up of different pieces that were meant to hold the shape together, while the outside

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England," Dan Aykroyd explained, "the one *Poltergeist* was based on. The name mysteriously appeared written on the walls throughout the house. For our film, we figured we might as well take something that had been reported as a real occurrence and use it for our main demon and supernatural force. Mr. Stay-Puft, on the other hand, was really just a brand symbol like the Michelin Tire Man or the Pillsbury Dough Boy that has come out of the American consciousness and is then thrown back in our faces by the Gozer. I think of him as being this nice, cute little guy walking down Broadway, hurling sucrose blobs at everybody."

"I think the concept of the Stay-Puft man made everybody a little nervous going in," Michael Gross commented. "Early on, whenever someone read the script, we'd ask them what they thought of the idea, because we were real worried it would take the movie over the top. Harold really struggled to keep the whole film within some kind of reality and believability, but then when it gets to the end and suddenly a 150-foot marshmallow man starts walking through Manhattan, we were all thinking: 'Oh, no! Godzilla time!' Then, when we thought about the problems of doing it realistically, we knew that was impossible — I mean, you put a guy in a rubber suit and you know the audience *knows* it's a guy in a rubber suit. But when we saw the early tests

*The Gozer
psychic
and Dan
by light
into Terr*







